



South Street Station placed on National Register

The designation from the National Register of Historic Places makes the renovation project eligible for up to \$50 million in tax credits.

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PROVIDENCE -- The South Street Station, the former Narragansett power plant at 360 Eddy St., has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Struever Bros., Eccles & Rouse plans to develop the plant into Dynamo House, a hotel, office space, restaurant and museum space for the Heritage Harbor Museum.

The designation makes the project eligible for tax credits, which may reach more than \$50 million in the \$140-million Dynamo House project.

"This would not be feasible without the benefit of tax credits," said Seth Handy, a development director with Struever Bros.

The National Register is the federal government's list of properties whose historical and architectural significance makes them worthy of preservation.

Frederick C. Williamson, chairman of the Rhode Island Historical Preservation & Heritage Commission, announced this week that the National Park Service had added South Street Station to the register.

According to the state historical commission, station was built by Narragansett Electric Lighting Co. between 1912 and 1925. The building is significant for the broad impact it had on the spread of electric service in Rhode Island and as an excellent example of early 20th-century power plant design.

Narragansett Electric was established in 1884 by entrepreneur Edward Goff and sold within the year to a group of investors led by a prominent Providence businessman, Marsden J. Perry .

The timing was perfect, as Rhode Island's demand for new, safe, efficient power sources was growing. Electricity became the dominant source of power for street lighting, factory machinery, trolley transportation and residential use.

When the company bought its only rival, the Rhode Island Electric Lighting Co., in 1889, Perry and his fellow investors cemented a monopoly on electricity generation in the state.

The South Street Station was the third major plant for the company and the second on the Eddy Street site. Work on the new facility began in 1912-14 with the construction of a boiler house and engine room that incorporated the 257-foot chimney stack from the Central Power Station and four new 217-foot chimneys. South Street Station's Classical Revival architecture, with its arcaded fenestration and decorative brickwork, conveyed a sense of stately stability to the public and was typical of power plants of the period.

The demand for electricity from municipalities, institutions, private homeowners, businesses and industry increased dramatically through the 1910s and 1920s. Production at South Street Station increased from 41 million kwh in 1913 to 229 million kwh in 1921.

By the early 1920s, the company had more than 71,000 customers and its territory stretched the length of Rhode Island along the west side of Narragansett Bay, reaching into Massachusetts and Connecticut. In addition to electric companies, Perry acquired gas, water and electric streetcar companies, creating a vast financial network and opportunities for expansion. The streetcars encouraged the development of suburbs, which in turn demanded the extension of gas, water and electric service.

New construction at South Street Station between 1916 and 1921 included expanding the boiler house, accommodating a massive turbo-generator in the engine house, building a portion of the substation, adding to the 200 pound house and turbine hall, and erecting a new switch house by 1923.

In 1924-25, the company spent \$4.65 million to erect the 400 pound house, an extension of the 200 pound house, the perimeter fence, and a water intake tunnel. While the station remained largely unaltered for the next twenty years, the company's corporate structure changed significantly. In 1927, the New England Power Association created Narragansett Electric Co. and used that to purchase Narragansett Electric Lighting Co. The acquisition ushered in a period of corporate streamlining, perhaps most notably in 1947, when the New England Electric System was established as a new holding company for the many utilities, including Narragansett Electric Lighting that had been acquired by the power association in the early 1900s.

After World War II, the electric system doubled its generating capacity.

The South Street Station was phased out in favor of the Manchester Street Power Plant. In 1999, the original 1912-25 structure was donated to Heritage Harbor Corporation, which intends to rehabilitate the building for commercial use and as a statewide history museum.

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